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Author(s): Margaret Brent Downing

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THE OLD CATHOLIC CHAPEL AND GRAVEYARD NEAR AQUIA, STAFFORD COUNTY, VA.

When some months ago, the Right Rev. D. J. O'Connell, Bishop of Richmond, purchased six acres of land at the cross-roads near Wayside, in Stafford County, Va., he took the initial step to restore to its sacred uses the oldest land in the Old Dominion which had come under Catholic ownership. Wayside has been carved out of the old plantation of Richland on the broad highway connecting Washington and Richmond and is exactly fourteen miles from Fredericksburg. It is an orchard farm now but it occupies the site of the villege of Aquia or Acquia which has an honorable record in history, once the scene of busy operations in the nearby quarries and possessing a substantial warfage from which ships sailed to foreign ports carrying grain and tobacco and to domestic harbours with the beautiful white marble which abounds in this section. Acquia in Richland furnished the stone from which the earliest buildings in Philadelphia and thereabout were composed and from it came the material of which the United States Capitol and other Federal structures were erected. The old wharf at Richland received the last ship which cleared a British port for this country prior to the revolution and on it was one passenger of stupendous importance in Catholic annals, Father John Carroll. But Acquia has passed away. Grass had overgrown its tidy streets before the past century was old, its manor house, first abandoned and then destroyed is difficult if not impossible to trace in the woodland tangle and the small stone structure where Catholics worshiped for the first time in Virginia and the Holy Rood where the confessors of the faith await the glorious resurrection had years ago become a forgotten spot.

Acquia and the adjacent island of Widdington is part of the manor grant of 30,000 acres between the Potomac and the Rappahannock Rivers which James II bestowed on Captain George Brent of Woodstock, England, in 1687. Captain Brent was the half nephew of Giles and Foulke Brent whose names bristle on the pages of Leonard Calvert's administration as governor of Maryland and it was to his home that these gentlemen and their sisters, Margaret and Mary, came for refuge from troubles in Lord Baltimore's palatinate. George Brent, the immigrant and founder of the Acquia branch of the Brent line, called his estate Woodstock after his old home, but in later years, though the laws of primogeniture were strictly enforced, that portion which bordered on the Potomac and on which the village of Acquia was built was called Richland. At the time that Fr. John Carroll returned from England disheartened and believing his ecclesiastical career ended in the prime, William Brent was the owner of Richland whilst his elder brother Robert resided at Woodstock.

These Brent brothers who were fourth in descent from George the immigrant had married sisters of the future prelate, Robert's wife being Anne the eldest of the four daughters of Daniel Carroll of Marlborough

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and Eleanor Darnall of Woodyard and Mrs. William Brent, Eleanor was the second daughter. Robert and Anne Brent were the parents of that Robert Brent who was the first mayor of Washington and who held the office for the first ten years of the National Capital's existence.

James II in granting to Captain George Brent of Woodstock, this princely domain in Virginia, had added an inestimable privilege, that of liberty of conscience and free right to practice his religion on his estate and elsewhere, a rare privilege in those days. Associated with George Brent in obtaining land and the promise of religious liberty were Richard Foote, gentleman of Kent and Nicholas Hayward and Robert Basston, gentlemen of London. This Captain Brent was the son of a country squire who bore the same name, George, and his mother was the Lady Mariana, daughter of Sir John Dunnington of the Island of Ely. There were six brothers of the immigrant all of whom had borne arms for the Stuart cause. Early in 1687, George Brent had taken possesson of his patrimony and had begun the erection of the handsome stone mansion Woodstock which figures in colonial social chronicles during the next hundred years. George Brent was twice married, his first wife was Mary, daughter of Captain William Green of Bermuda and his second spouse bore the name of Mary also, and was the daughter of the Honorable Henry Seward of Mattapony, Secretary of the Maryland province, and his wife who became later the second consort of Charles Calvert, third Baron of Baltimore.

As the seventeenth century drew to its stormy close in the colonies of Great Britain travel between Virginia and Maryland was almost entirely by water. Captain Brent brought his bride by boat to the port of Acquia and made the journey inland by horse. For the convenience of Catholics who were nearer to Acquia than to chapels of Maryland and for whom the long journey to the manor house at Woodstock would have been a hardship, the stone building which had been erected in connection with the port was pressed into service and here the Holy Sacrifice was offered openly for a few happy years, and then furtively and at tragic risk later when the penal laws were in force.

In the archives of Annapolis where the personal papers of the Lords Palatinate of Maryland are kept, may be read a letter from Charles Calvert earnestly advising his son-in-law because of religious persecution to dispose of his holdings in Virginia and to make his home nearby his kindred in Maryland. But George Brent was made of sterner stuff. Though there are absolutely no records which can be quoted to prove the continuous existence of this humble place of worship the ruins of which Bishop O'Connell has rescued from oblivion, there is abundant collateral proof. Robert and William Brent were in 1760 classmates of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, and of John and Daniel Carroll of Marlborough at the first Catholic academy in the English speaking portion of the United States, that of Bohemia Manor conducted by the Jesuits. Many family letters, several of which may be inspected in the James Dudley Morgan collection as yet unassorted or indexed in the Library of Congress, which

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tell of visits of the priests of Bohemia Manor, and in other parts of Maryland to Richland near which was the building that in penal days must needs present any appearance save that of a church and in which, from time to time, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered. The Brents of the fourth generation were therefore professing that which had been the creed of the heads of the family from Captain George down to Robert the Mayor, who was the first definitely to abandon the Virginia patrimony and take residence in the new Federal city.

Bishop O'Connell hopes to rebuild the humble chapel along the lines shown by the stone foundations. He is diligently searching the records to restore the broken and obliterated tombstones and like a skilfull scientist who from a few bones can rebuild a mammoth in its pristine form, he is gradually deciphering the marking on the original graves of George Brent and his wife Mary who was the daughter of Lady Baltimore, as a key to other interpretations. All of the family and their many slaves and Catholics of the riverside for three generations from 1698, the first date until 1798, found a resting place in this hallowed ground. When these graves have been restored and the annals of the chapel regathered from the scattered members of the Brent family, an unknown chapter of Catholic history in Virginia can be written.

Fr. John Carroll on taking over parochial duties in 1774 from his mother's home at Rock Creek, included Acquia on the estate of William Brent Esquire, of Richland, among his permanent missions. When the Declaration of Independence gave Catholics equal rights with their neighbors the chapel of Acquia is named in the visitations assigned to the first priests who attended the country districts along the Potomac and inland to the Rappahannock. Inferentially this is strong proof that the chapel was a recognized place of Catholic worship in pre-revolutionary years though a burning controversy has already arisen over the mere assertion that previous to 1776 there was any sort of Catholic church or chapel in Virginia. Much digging into family annals remains to be done before adequate history of Virginia's oldest place of Catholic worship can be written. But that its site has been purchased by the Bishop of Richmond is a happy omen. He has already to his credit two admirable achievements along historical lines. He was indirectly the agent through which the Catholic patriot and engineer, Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant was taken from a neglected grave and buried with military honors at Arlington. He discovered the clause in the will of Richard Queen through which the Archdiocese of Baltimore would become permanent owners of the property on which the hollowed Queen's chapel and graveyard were situated. Through his efforts and inspiration money was raised to build the lovely little rural church of St. Frances de Sales in the village of Langdon on the same spot where the colonial chapel of the Queens had been placed more than a hundred years before.

MARGARET BRENT DOWNING.

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